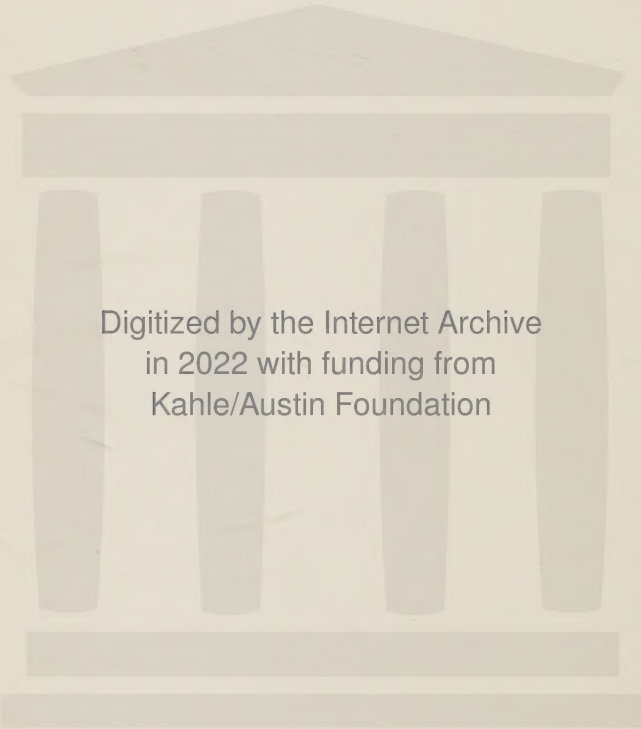

THOMAS
CHATTERTON
*
ELLINGER

821

C

E

Trinity College Library
Washington, D.C. 20017



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

THOMAS CHATTERTON

THOMAS
CHATTERTON
THE
MARVELOUS BOY

To which is added
THE EXHIBITION
A Personal Satire

BY ESTHER PARKER ELLINGER

PHILADELPHIA
University of Pennsylvania Press

London: Humphrey Milford
Oxford University Press

MCMXXX

Copyright, 1930
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PRESS

10 9391



CONTENTS

THOMAS CHATTERTON

PAGE

I	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	9
II	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	35
Notes	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	48

THE EXHIBITION

Introduction	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	53
Notes	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	58
Text	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	59

To
PROFESSOR RAYMOND D. HAVENS



THOMAS CHATTERTON

The Marvelous Boy

I

NOT only do "books receive their doom accord- 9
ing to the reader's capacity" but often the
very fame of authors themselves. For many
years it has been generally accepted that the genius
of Thomas Chatterton is revealed in a single volume,
his *Poems supposed to have been written in Bristol by
Thomas Rowley and others in the fifteenth century*; yet
the strange richness of his genius can never be con-
ceived until it is traced through the diverse types and
moods of the *Complete Works*. Had all the Rowley
poems perished with their author in 1770, he would
nevertheless still occupy a conspicuous position in
eighteenth century literature for his important verse
satires, which record the keen verdicts of a Dryden
with the manners of Churchill. These are as com-
pletely in accord with one tendency of the period as
the Rowley poems are revelations of another sym-
pathy; and the extraordinary contrast between the
two groups is as marked in technical skill as in con-
tent and tone. It seems scarcely possible to reconcile
Rowley's "Minstrelles Song" in *Ælla* ("O! syng
unto mie roundelaie") with the sprawling diatribe
of *Kew Gardens*, or the noble dignity of *The Battle*

Thomas Chatterton

10 of *Hastings, II* with the chaotic factional spirit of *The Consuliad*; and it is difficult to realize that the same pen wrote *The Exhibition* and—just two months later—*An Excellente Balade of Charitie*.

The usual explanation is that advanced by Professor Wilson in 1869 and echoed approvingly by Edward Bell in his memoir prefaced to the Skeat edition of 1871:

[Chatterton's] character has a double aspect. The coarse satires, the trivial verses, and the worthless magazine contributions which he did not hesitate to avow as his own, are the fruits of that restless spirit of emulation which continually urged him since his infant days to take pre-eminence amongst his compeers; while the more serious creations of his mind, themselves unacknowledged yet associated with all his nobler but unconfessed aspirations, are the sole exponents of the truer inspiration in possession of which he walked in mental solitude. . . . (1)

As a matter of fact, Chatterton's work falls into four groups, not two: for the satires and the Rowley poems are independent in material and temper from each other and from either the pot-boiler magazine articles or the lesser occasional verses. The method of the prose is frankly imitative, whether in the letters to the *Political Register* in the style of Junius or in stories like *Maria Friendless*, where Chatterton paraphrases a story in Johnson's *Rambler*. Obviously written to sell, it reveals little originality although its versatility is characteristic of Chatterton's usual deft facility in composition. The minor poems are also

The Marvelous Boy

occasional in nature and show a variety of moods: 11
there are simple love poems written to assist a friend
in his courtship; acrostics and gay crambo songs
addressed to the girls of his acquaintance; elegies
comic and sincere. Of the thirty or forty items in the
group, scarcely more than three reach real lyric
power, notably the two elegies in memory of Phillips
and the troubled harmonies of *The Resignation*.
Chatterton's was not essentially a lyric nature, nor
is the type characteristic.

None of the occasional work appears sufficiently
significant to warrant close study. There is adequate
explanation for all of it in contemporaneous circum-
stances of the poet's life. Those few passages which
can be interpreted autobiographically give informa-
tion of secondary rather than primary importance,
although the extra illumination is always welcome.
It is therefore in the Rowley poems and in the verse
satires that the real Chatterton is discovered, for
these hold the clue to that strange genius which in
the satires seems (despite his youth) so experienced
and meteoric, yet in the Rowley poems artless and
radiant. The most fruitful approach to an orderly
comprehension of Chatterton's personality is un-
doubtedly through a study of his artistic develop-
ment, following it in conjunction with his personal
history through his brief and crowded years. Chat-
terton was but eighteen when he died, yet an observer
looking at the completed fabric of his life can readily
detect the pattern running through it, clearly marked
despite the limitations and the later obliterations of
time.

Thomas Chatterton

12 Born in Bristol on November 20, 1752, Thomas Chatterton was the son of parents in humble life, each sufficiently gifted for the fact to be remarked by their neighbors. The father, some seventeen years older than his young wife, was musical, and a great reader, with some "taste for antiquities." He is reported to have formed a collection of several hundred specimens of the Roman coins frequently dug up near Bristol in the old camp sites at Ken-moor.⁽²⁾ At the time of his death he occupied a semi-official position in the Cathedral choir, and was also serving as master of a school. Mrs. Chatterton was a woman of many cares, and is described as nervous and energetic, impatient, active, passionate. The fine needlework, the embroidery and pattern-making with which she supported her family after the elder Chatterton died seems to indicate that she was possessed of artistic talent. Both music and drawing were to serve their son's necessities during his short life; but in his earliest years he gave no sign that he had inherited either of these gifts.

As a child of five, when first we hear of him in the family records, Thomas was morose and gloomy, apparently unable to accept the rudimentary education first offered him, somewhat notional, certainly not normal from the standpoint of ordinary behavior. In the crowded, bustling home he would sit quietly in his little chair for long periods, lost in reveries which were often ended by tears inexplicable to his family. "His mother thought him an absolute fool, and often, when correcting him told him so."⁽³⁾ Yet even in those days he was displaying that strange thirst for preëminence which was always his foremost charac-

The Marvelous Boy

teristic. "Before he was 5 years old," relates his sister, Mrs. Newton,⁽⁴⁾ "he would always preside over his playmates as their master and they his hired servants"; or he would stand up before them on the church steps and hold them spellbound while he recited poetry and declaimed. 13

Not until he was seven, when his imagination had been captivated by the colored capitals in an old music folio of his father's, did he emerge from mental lethargy and learn to read, his textbook an old black-letter Bible.⁽⁵⁾ While at times he still brooded in his corner, at least he now seemed generally conscious of his surroundings.⁽⁶⁾ He began to display towards his family that extravagant personal affection which he always lavished on them, promising his mother and sister "a deal of finery, when he grew up, as a result of her care."⁽⁷⁾ He read incessantly, so that soon they feared for his health. When they drove him from his books, he would take refuge in St. Mary Redcliffe, the fine old church across the way, his favorite playground. There he spent long happy hours talking with his uncle, the sexton, who liked him for his spirit and manly airs, or wandering at will through the tomb-thick shadows, where lay Maistre Canynge and other Bristol worthies of the long ago. Free from the comments and expostulations of his busy home, he puzzled over the strange old inscriptions and explored whatever took his fancy, literally the lord of all he surveyed. As in the case of William Blake at Westminster Abbey, "the figures became . . . his friends; with their shadowy companionship his imagination was peopled. . . . The result was that his brain

Thomas Chatterton

- 14 and imagination became . . . as remote from those of his neighbours as was the ancient building from the life without its walls.”⁽⁸⁾

When he was at home his mother, to keep him out of the way, allowed him undisputed possession of the attic. Searching for books to read he began to investigate the bundles of parchment MSS—old church records—which his mother was keeping to use for new thread papers, and on which he found the same archaic letterings he had first seen on the tombs in St. Mary Redcliffe. In time he learned how to erase the old writing; and this gave him paper in abundance on which to draw the antique swords, the coats of arms and ornate characters which filled his mind as half-remembered fancies.

He did not long enjoy this happy solitude, although he returned to it whenever possible. In his eighth year, on August 3, 1760, he assumed the blue gown and the monkish tonsure of the charity school called Colston's Hospital, a fantastic garb which must have pleased that love of the past which was even now his secret delight. Whatever intellectual interest this new venture may have aroused was, however, soon checked, for at Colston's he found only a meager curriculum of reading, writing, and accounts, and an atmosphere whose first effort was to restrain any display of original thought. The charity had been founded by a rich Bristol merchant earlier in the century “to assist in combating religious non-conformity and political liberalism,” and for a sensitive boy of eager imagination must have provided a harsh and unresponsive environment. Fortunately, the daily

The Marvelous Boy

routine allowed him some little freedom to walk along 15
the river or to visit his family; for though it was always easy for him to make friends there were few at the school with whom he was congenial. Hence even before he left Colston's Chatterton deliberately cultivated the company of older men, since only with them could he find the maturer interests he longed for.

But during his first months at the school he was still lonely. In his holidays he fled home to the attic, whence only the wiles of his family could bring him out at tea-time. To supplement his dull hours at school he spent all his pocket money on books from the circulating library—chiefly history and divinity. It seems strangely mature reading for a ten-year-old boy; and yet it becomes understandable upon recollection of the natural inclination that made him love the old church beside which he had grown up.

At what precise moment Chatterton began to compose verses was not recorded, and none of his earliest manuscripts are in existence. Early in his eleventh year his first poem to be published appeared in a Bristol paper. Like another of the same period which survives, it is religious in character, betraying nothing unusual beyond an undeniable ability to "lisp in numbers." Within the next year, however,—when he was eleven,—the boy produced three short satiric poems which are particularly significant in relation to his peculiar mental development. The verses carry a decided sting, and reveal—notably in *Apostate Will*, dated April 14, 1764—a surprisingly acute estimation of personality and conduct. Dr. Gregory, an early

16 biographer, shrewdly pointed out that here Chatterton departs from the custom of the usual young poet, whose early attempts at verse-making are generally "in the pastoral style, where the imagination is luxuriant, the hopes and contemplations romantic, and . . . the mind . . . better acquainted with the objects of nature and of the sight than any other." (9)

At the school there seems to have been but one master—Thomas Phillips—who was at all intelligent or interesting. Apparently Chatterton was at first obliged to admire him from a distance, because as a member of a lower form he had not been included in Phillips' literary tournaments with the older boys. The master was therefore surprised when some time during the summer of 1764 Chatterton handed him several parchment manuscripts, one of which has been identified as probably an early version of the eclogue *Elinoure and Juga, written three hundred years ago by T. Rowley, secular priest*. The verses were gentle and melancholy, and as ancient in flavor as in appearance. But "T. Rowley, secular priest"—who was he? Phillips' fascinated glance never strayed from the strange jumbled characters to the small tonsured secular *Thomas* by his side,—a boy not quite twelve. Instead he bent all his energies to deciphering the words; and evidently approved of the translation he finally asked Chatterton to make. Here was the young poet's first victory; and even while he was not able to take it entirely to himself, at least it gained him the master's attention, as well as a certain amount of praise and appreciation for the discovery.

His thirst for notice, so long unappeased, was re- 17
warded at last by this second-hand fame. For the
moment it sufficed, since it allowed him to boast of
his treasures among the boys. To a few of his be-
wilderred friends he even showed off in reckless mo-
ments, rubbing a parchment on the ground or holding
it over a candle to give it a look of age. But none of
them had any taste for antiquity or appreciated
Rowley, so Chatterton never talked definitely to
them on the subject. They did call upon him, how-
ever, for bits of school satire, so that occasionally his
sharp pen got him into trouble with the masters. But
he continued, as before, his habits of retirement.
During school periods he necessarily observed the
dull routine of prosaic work. In his play hours he
continued reading history, theology, philosophy, the
older English authors, and whatever else he could beg
or borrow. During holidays and occasional after-
noons of leave he locked himself in the attic at
home to work with his papers, his inks and colors. At
first he seems to have done this merely for his own
pleasure; but towards the end of his stay at Colston's,
when he was about fourteen, he was introduced to two
men whose interest gave direction to his labors.

The first of these was William Barrett, a surgeon
and antiquarian, who had long been engaged on a
history of Bristol. His pleasant house stood by the
river not far from the School. Chatterton went
there often, to borrow old books or to discuss the
medical texts Barrett lent him. Sometimes Barrett
sent for the boy deliberately to engage him in dis-
cussion, "that he might see his remarkable eyes blaze

18 up in the fire of argument." Before long Chatterton was finding for him among Rowley's parchments ancient Bristol deeds and architectural plans, old city records and heraldic devices—just what the surgeon needed for his projected book. With George Catcott, the other friend he made at this time, the boy's intimacy progressed more slowly, and was founded on a different attraction. Catcott was a self-centered man, vain and hard, possessing more culture and refinement of intellect than Barrett and, moreover, a superficial knowledge of literature and literary fashion that gave the boy something he found nowhere else. Rowley admired Catcott, too, and soon delighted him by producing for his pleasure *The Bristol Tragedy* and the *Epitaph on Canynge*—wonderful verses from the pen of a fourteen-year-old boy, and quickly followed by others as remarkable.

Another connection formed at this time was less profitable. Catcott's partner was William Burgum, an unlearned, unimaginative business man, somewhat blustering and excessively vain; but he had a native love of music, and evidently liked to think of himself as a person of importance and a patron of the arts. Curiously enough Rowley's manuscripts held a treasure for him, too,—the de Bergham pedigree traced back in graphic detail to Norman sources, and a brief poem by one of the de Bergham ancestors, with which a modernized version was thoughtfully included. One branch of the pedigree showed that long ago in the fifteenth century the Burgum and Chatterton families had intermarried, to the honor of each.

The Marvelous Boy

All this filled the spare moments of the spring of 1767. On July 1 of that year the fourteen-year-old boy left Colston's, and was bound as apprentice to John Lambert, a Bristol attorney. Chatterton went to Lambert unwillingly, for he had wanted to study medicine with Barrett. He had long outgrown the curriculum at Colston's, but now he was exchanging one irksome situation for another even more intolerable. Lambert looked on him as a child; treated him as a servant; caned him when he learned that the boy had sent his old head-master at Colston's a satirical anonymous letter; nagged him for not reading law in his leisure moments; and tore Chatterton's papers to shreds whenever he discovered them in the office, saying contemptuously, as he flung the scraps away, "There is your stuff." He sent servants to spy on the boy, to make sure that he stayed on duty during the hours prescribed; and when the day was over hedged the boy's evening freedom with permissions, required him to eat in the servants' quarters, and to share the foot-boy's attic room.

That Chatterton was soon excited to fury and disgust is not surprising. He knew his intellectual attainments to be far superior to those of a servant. His abilities had already received some recognition; and his self-confidence had been confirmed in the contacts with Catcott and Barrett. All the evidence proves that during his three years with Lambert he was faithful in every actual obligation to his employer. But although the work required of him filled little more than two of the twelve hours he had to stay in the office, Lambert resented any use of the

Thomas Chatterton

20 idle working hours for Chatterton's own composition. In order to accomplish all that he desired the boy would therefore sit up most of the night writing by moonlight. During office hours he worked with one eye on the door.

The contrast between Lambert's treatment and the cordiality of his own acquaintances in Bristol made Chatterton hate his situation to the point of bitterness. In Rowley's world, however, there was freedom from the intolerable sense of bondage and a sure refuge for his sore spirit. Barrett was delighted with Rowley's deeds and sketches. Catcott grew as enthusiastic as his cold egotism would allow over the Rowley poems and discourses. Chatterton penetrated Rowley's world deeper and deeper. "His ambition increased daily," writes his sister. "His spirits was rather uneven, sometimes so gloom'd that for many days together he would say very little and that by constraint. At other times exceedingly chearfull. When in spirits he would enjoy his rising fame—confident of advancement he would promise my mother and me should be partakers of his success."⁽¹⁰⁾ He became convinced that he was a truly noble person of the most ancient lineage, as he had hinted in the Burgum pedigree. With a regal gesture he drew up a description of the Chatterton arms, illustrated with nine sketches of various Chatterton escutcheons; and there were many other evidences of this growing tendency to dignify himself in his own eyes. He soon stood badly in need of whatever comfort this could bring him; for early in 1769, when he had been with Lambert nearly two years, all his schemes were threatened.

The Marvelous Boy

The year had begun well. Rowley continued to 21
open Bristol's doors. Chatterton was beginning successful publication in the London journals, with political letters in the *Middlesex Journal* and several Ossianic imitations, one Rowley poem, and two or three prose tales in the *Town and Country Magazine*. Hoping for influential patronage, with Barrett's assistance he began a maddening and futile correspondence with Horace Walpole which by the end of the summer resulted in nothing but bitter disappointment. The consequent morbid depression was not helped by the tone of a disturbing friendship he had recently formed with Michael Clayfield, a retired distiller. Clayfield was a notorious liberal in all his views. With him Chatterton read astronomy, and discussed revealed religion and the problems of Life and Death, soon reaching philosophical convictions sternly at variance with the conformity he had learned at Colston's. He reduced his religious creed to six articles which conformed to Clayfield's theories, and variously proclaimed himself a determined free-thinker towards the accepted philosophy of the day. While he was in this unfortunate mood the social and moral problem of suicide was brought to his attention; and a passage in *The Unfortunate Fathers*, written probably in October, 1769, seems to reflect Chatterton's consideration of the question and his ultimate acceptance of the method as a legitimate social practice:

. . . I shall not accuse your conduct, for you are my father; I shall only endeavor to vindicate the action I am about to perpetrate. This will be easily done. There is a principle in men (a shadow

of the Divinity) which constitutes him the image of God; you may call it conscience, grace, inspiration, the spirit or whatever name your education gives it. If a man acts according to this regulator, he is right; if contrary to it, he is wrong. It is an approved truth, that this principle varies in every rational being. As I can reconcile suicide to this principle, with me it is consequently no crime. Suicide is sometimes a noble insanity of the soul; and often the result of a mature and deliberate approbation of the soul. If ever a crime it is only so to society; there indeed it always appears an irrational emotion; but when our being becomes unsocial, when we neither assist, or are assisted by society, we do not injure it by laying down our load of life. It may seem a paradoxical assertion that we can not do wrong to ourselves, but it is certain we have power over our own existence. Such is my opinion, and I have made use of such power.

The action of the hero in this story, who shot himself after a quarrel with his father, probably reflects (as it also parallels) the suicide, in the early autumn of 1769, of the brother of the poet's particular friend, William Smith. The shock of the news which had brought home to Chatterton's troubled mind—possibly for the first time—the bitter reality of death was none the less keen for his mistaking the first report to refer to William; and the grief—though quickly spent—left its mark. It was, moreover, precursor to the most cruel sorrow this year held in store. Within the month Chatterton suffered the loss of his first friend, Thomas Phillips.

Now in earnest he faced the problem of existence, as is shown by the *Epistle to Clayfield*, October 30,

The Marvelous Boy

1769. What answer he found seems indicated in the 23
closing lines of the *Elegy* he immediately addressed
to Phillips' memory:

Now rest, my Muse, but only rest to weep
A friend made dear by every sacred tie;
Unknown to me be comfort, peace or sleep:
Phillips is dead—'tis pleasure then to die.

Few are the pleasures Chatterton e'er knew,
Short were the moments of his transient peace
But melancholy robbed him of those few,
And this hath bid all future comfort cease.⁽¹¹⁾

It took Chatterton weeks to rally from this distress. It was not even possible for him to take refuge with Rowley, for Rowley's world had vanished about the time the boy received his last letter from Walpole. Not therefore in the past could the poet find consolation: indeed, the actuality of his present anxieties and sorrows was not to be escaped. As if he had closed the door upon one phase of existence and entered another, Chatterton's note-books began to be filled with satires to the exclusion even of occasional verses: first in August with the dignified yet devastating lines to Walpole, then increasingly during September and October. In November he was too crushed by Phillips' death to accomplish anything beyond a few verses reflecting that disaster. But with December came a rush of satiric compositions. His astronomical study with Clayfield and his recent realization of life's problems resulted (on December 6, 1769) in an *Epistle to the Reverend Mr. Catcott* in which he attacked not only that clergyman's fundamentalist *Treatise on the Deluge*, but by occasion some

24 other Bristol citizens whose standards of conduct annoyed him.

That his chief critical points were well taken does not matter in this discussion. What is of importance is that here the poet expressed himself for the first time as an “enemy of revealed religion,” as an unorthodox disciple of Reason *versus* Revelation, and as a sharp and outspoken critic of his betters. Evidently he suffered immediately for his recklessness, because by the end of the month he had penned two semi-apologies, one a formal prose paragraph on December 20 to the Catcott brothers, which displays a strange mixture of regret and conceited obstinacy; the other, called *The Defence*, addressed to William Smith on December 25, 1769, in which the poet’s attitude is resentful and assured:

No more, dear Smith, the hacknied Tale renew;
I own their censure, I approve it, too.
For how can Idiots, destitute of thought
Conceive or estimate but as they’re taught? . . .
But why must Chatterton selected sit
The butt of every Critic’s little wit?
Am I alone forever in a crime
Nonsense in prose, or blasphemy in Rhyme? . . .
“Read but another fancy of his brain;
He’s atheistical in every strain.”
Fallacious is the charge—’tis all a lie,
As to my reason I can testify,
I own a God, immortal, boundless, wise,
Who bid our glories of Creation rise;
Who formed His varied likeness in mankind,
Centering His many wonders in the mind;
Who saw Religion a fantastic night,
But gave us Reason to obtain the light.

There is evidence that about this time a swift and 25
unrequited affection for some Bristol girl further provoked his distress to misanthropic rage. His work in January reflects this. The fierce wild *Heccar and Gaira, an African Ecologue* is in its way quite as curdling as the extended narrative of *The Consuliad*, now re-written from the version of the preceding October—"a political piece in the highest strain of party scurrility." By the end of the month he was working on *Resignation*, the first of his sustained satiric attacks on Bute and the London Tories. Soon he began to amalgamate various satiric fragments already composed into the tremendous *Kew Gardens*, which was not finished until April. It is a harsh and disorderly piece of work, roughly phrased, energized by a venomous handling of personalities. Here again, as in the *Epistle to Catcott*, much of the powerful attack is correctly animated; but its very recklessness and vehemence undoubtedly reflected the chaotic state of Chatterton's mind as he wrote it.

For six months his ambitions, his hopes, his affections had endured one defeat after another. The satires had aroused against him the resentment of his former patrons, if not of his friends. In the young poet's general state of nerves his situation with Lambert grew more hateful than ever. Clayfield seemed his only true friend, yet Catcott and Barrett disapproved the connection. By February the example of Peter Smith, who had escaped earthly misery through suicide, must have seemed to Chatterton to point to the easiest method of settling an intolerable life. But his intention was discovered;

26 and the act which had promised release and oblivion served merely to precipitate another tempest. After what probably was a dreadful session with Lambert and Barrett, he attempted a written apology. The letter, addressed to Barrett, is charged with a pitiful and unnatural excitement:

Sir,

Upon recollection, I don't know how Mr. Clayfield could come by his letter, as I intended to have given him a letter but did not. In regard to my motives for the supposed rashness, I shall observe, that I keep no worse company than myself; I never drink to excess, and have, without vanity too much sense to be attached to the mercenary retailers of iniquity. No! it is my *Pride*, my damn'd native, unconquerable Pride, that plunges me into distraction. You must know that the 19/20th of my composition is pride: I must either live a slave, a servant, have no will of my own, no sentiments of my own which I may freely declare as such; or DIE. Perplexing alternative! but it distracts me to think of it. I will endeavor to learn humility, but it can not be here. What it may cost me in the trial, Heaven knows!

I am

Your much obliged, unhappy
humble servant,

T. C.

He was right in the apprehension that humility was not to be learned in Bristol. He was not allowed to forget his sinful temptation. Possibly it was Barrett's medical mind which ascribed the desire to insanity. The prominent men of Bristol recoiled from their former association with the strangely

gifted apprentice. Their hostility continued him in 27 distraction, and by the middle of April again he resolved on suicide as the only remedy for his distress. On Easter Even, "between 11 and 12 o'clock Saturday, April 14, 1770, in the utmost distress of mind," he wrote his *Will*, having determined (either satirically or by a poetic impulse that denies his avowed atheism) to die next day on the Feast of the Resurrection. Every line of the document betrays the resentment he felt for the men who had refused him help and sympathy. The legal formality of the opening passage breaks off suddenly with an ironic flare against the final indignity they had offered him:

. . . The Soundness of my Mind the Coroner and Jury are to be judges of—desiring them to take notice, that the most perfect Masters of Human Nature in Bristol Distinguish me by the Title of the Mad Genius therefore if I do a mad action it is conformable to every Action of my Life, which all savoured of Insanity—

The *Will* directed how this boy whom the world had despised was to be remembered in death. Chatterton specified that certain tablets should be erected over his tomb, testifying to the age and dignity of his family, and displaying the Chatterton arms and achievements. Thereafter the document took a curious turn. Chatterton detailed certain bequests, the first of which were more or less reasonable; but the remaining ones were satirical and vindictive, composed in imitation of an old testament which had recently appeared in the *Town & Country Magazine*.

Yet Chatterton did not die on Easter, for again his

28 purpose was discovered. Within a few days he rose from abysmal unhappiness to the heights of ecstasy. Unexpectedly he found himself free (although his indenture with Lambert had still four years to run), for the attorney could not too quickly rid his household of the wild youth, and released him at once from his apprenticeship. During the preceding eighteen months Chatterton had been sending articles to the London magazines, and had been in flattering correspondence with several editors. Now there was nothing to keep him from the city that offered fame and immediate success. The admiring generosity of a few younger friends provided money for the journey. Almost overnight Chatterton's wounded spirit was comforted: there were still men in Bristol who believed in him, and so at last London was within reach. True, he had no great patron there on whose support he could rely; but he had the energy of youth (he was seventeen years and five months old). He had the promises of the booksellers. He had a treasure of unpublished manuscripts. Thomas Chatterton needed nothing else.

Two weeks after he wrote the *Will* he was in London, "safe and in high spirits." "What a glorious prospect . . . Good God! how superior is London to that despicable place Bristol!" At once he adopted the tavern life of the editors and the politicians. John Wilkes himself welcomed him, wondering at his youth. His charming personal qualities, now released from the bonds of Bristol's surveillance, and the "character" he carried in his pen gave him entrance everywhere. He took a last bitter fling at

his old enemies at home, sending back to his intimate friend Cary a corrosive "personal satire," *The Exhibition*, certainly the most savage verses he ever composed. During the next four jubilant weeks he lived on the heights. Suddenly at the end of May the Government proceeded against the Whig journals, and two of Chatterton's patron editors were imprisoned and their papers suspended.

At this juncture his cousin, Mrs. Ballance, at whose lodgings Chatterton boarded, recommended him to get into some office. "He stormed about the room like a madman," Sir Herbert Croft quoted Mrs. Ballance as saying,⁽¹²⁾ "and frightened her not a little by telling her he hoped, by the blessing of God, very soon to be sent prisoner to the Tower, which would make his fortune:—that he intended to settle the nation before he had done!" Earlier he had "quarrelled with her for calling him 'Cousin Tommy,' " and asked her if she ever heard of a poet's being called Tommy: but she assured him she knew nothing of poets and only wished he would not set up for a gentleman. She had been much struck by his manner—which equalled the pride of Lucifer. Later she spoke of it with bewilderment.

As it was, she could only watch his progress with amazement, and occasionally, with anxiety; as when—as he often did—he would look steadfastly in a person's face, without speaking, or seeming to see the person, for a quarter of an hour or more, till it was quite frightful; during all which time (she supposed from what she heard afterward) his thoughts were gone elsewhere. The other people in the house also

30 found him a strange creature—he would have such flights and vagaries. They all agreed that he was sadly proud and haughty, that he seemed to live on air, eating little and sleeping less; writing the night away. But they found something manly and pleasing in his manner, and they appreciated his unfailing civility, even though—as his landlady Mrs. Walmsley put it—he never “mistressed” her. They were unanimous in the verdict that no one would have taken him, from his behavior, to have been a poor boy of seventeen and a sexton’s son—that they never saw such a person before or afterward, he appeared to have something so wonderful about him.

Such was the young author who boasted to his fellow-lodgers that he hoped his fiery articles would provoke the Government to send him to the Tower. The prosecution, however, was content to imprison the editors and force their journals to suspend. Not at all disconcerted, Chatterton turned quickly to a dozen other schemes—“Bravo, hey boys, up we go!” he wrote to his sister. He engaged himself with a burletta for Ranelagh, scribbled sentimental tales for the magazines, even—boasting of his cleverness—dashed off some political articles in behalf of the Ministry! What promised most for the future was the connection he now formed with the Lord Mayor Beckford, on the occasion of Beckford’s famous remonstrance to the King. But on June 20 Beckford suddenly died, and once more Chatterton’s plans were defeated. He saw himself ruined and for a time—so Mrs. Ballance said afterward—he was perfectly frantic and out of his mind.

The Marvelous Boy

As yet little actual money had come in, but his 31
desires were frugal and no one paid attention to his
dress. He received his first large payment on July 6
—five guineas for the completed burletta *The Re-
venge*. Two days later he dispatched to his family a
box of long-promised gifts which cost him much more
than he could afford, but, as his landlord's niece said
later⁽¹³⁾, nothing was too good for him, nor was any-
thing to be too good for his family hereafter—he had
such a proud spirit as to send the gifts home “at a
time when she knew he was almost in want.” Chat-
terton must have known that it was a reckless ges-
ture, but the letter which he sent with the box be-
trayed nothing of his actual situation. Casually, at
the end, he directed his mother to notice his new
address,—she would not guess how wretched was
the garret to which he was now forced to move. His
pride vouchsafed the Walmsleys no reason for his
quitting their home, but the cause is clear.

Certainly by the end of June—if we may judge
from several passages in the *Memoirs of a Sad Dog*,
which was written during the month—Chatterton
was completely disillusioned as to the revenues to be
gained from magazine publication: “At the time of
writing this sad relation [I] am throned in a broken
chair within an inch of a thundercloud” he begins
whimsically. He had now no patron to push his
work; he had no influence at home on which to lean;
and he began to recognize the fact that, since hack
work was his only resort, once more he was in the
power of others. Politics was nothing but a question
of interest, promises so much water under London

32 Bridge. To succeed, even to live, he must write at the pleasure of the editors:—once more he was “friendless, penniless, forlorn.”

His satiric aptitude had passed, for the temporary failure of his hopes had checked his usual assurance. But as if to give him that comfort which the world refused him Rowley returned, bringing early in July the most beautiful and poignant of all his poems, “*An Excellente Balade of Charitie*: as wroten bie the gode Priest Thomas Rowley, 1464.”

Look in his gloomed face, his sprighte there
scanne;
Howe woe-be-gone, how withered, forwynd,
deade!
Haste to thie church-glebe-house, ashrewed
manne!
Haste to thie kiste, thie onlie dortoure bedde.
Cale as the claie which will gre on thie hedde
Is Charitie and Love aminge highe elves;
Knightis and Barons live for pleasure and them-
selves.

London had never been particularly interested in Rowley, and for the present still refused him welcome. In due course the verses were rejected. Chatterton had in the meantime moved to the cheaper lodgings at Mrs. Angel's, and after sending off his box of gifts bent every energy to reeling off pot-boilers like the trivial *Hunters of Oddity*, or an Oratorio which when finished was to purchase his sister a gown. By the end of July he was able to say, putting a fine face on his other affairs, “Almost all the next *Town and Country* is mine.” Yet he could not collect the eleven

pounds which the editors now owed him. By the 33
twelfth of August, when he dated the last extant
letter, he had recognized defeat. He wrote to George
Catcott with still enough spirit left to remark loft-
ily that he continued to disdain those comforts of
Christianity which Catcott loved, giving no hint of
his failure with the magazines, but mentioning cas-
ually that he hoped, with Barrett's help, to go abroad
as a surgeon.

The plan was not as preposterous as it might seem.
Chatterton possessed a little knowledge of practical
medicine. He had even read enough medical books
under Barrett to enable him (one of his friends said)
to "talk of Galen, Hippocrates and Paracelsus with
all the confidence and familiarity of a modern em-
pirick."⁽¹⁴⁾ He had enough courage and imagination
to have carried him through any crisis. But Barrett
refused. He recalled the threats of suicide, the hate-
ful "libertinism" of Chatterton's religious views; and
it is impossible that he had not heard some echoes of
The Exhibition. Chatterton's last hope failed.

Of the closing days of his life, of his conduct in de-
feat, we know little, but even this is characteristic. A
single sentence remains of the letter his mother re-
ceived the week before his death: "I am about to
quit my ungrateful country. I shall exchange it for
the deserts of Africa, where tigers are a thousand
times more merciful than man."⁽¹⁵⁾ Whether this
indicated a new scheme of emigration, or was written
while he was still waiting to hear from Barrett, we
do not know. There is also the glimpse we have of
him on the night he died. As one of his critics re-

34 marks in admiration of the poet's unfailing spirit, pride and honor never deserted him. So on this last night of life he refused Mrs. Angel's kindly offer when she met him in the hall and begged he would take dinner with her, because "he was offended by her expressions, which seemed to hint that he was in want, and assured her he was not hungry"⁽¹⁶⁾—though his looks showed him to be three parts starved. Mr. Cross, a neighboring druggist, had also offered hospitality because he recognized the boy's need. Chatterton had refused his offers, too.

"No! it is my *Pride*, my damn'd, native, unconquerable *Pride*, that plunges me into distraction," he had written to Barrett, promising to cultivate humility at any cost. He did not learn humility in London, either; and the trial cost him life itself.

The next morning, that of the 25th of August, 1770, he was found dead in his garret room, probably from an arsenic preparation he had bought not long before from Mr. Cross. Had he purchased it with the intention of suicide? He told Mr. Cross that it was to rid his attic of the rats that plagued him there. He left behind only a few bitter, acid verses voicing his final contempt for Bristol, and ending:

Farewell, my Mother!—cease, my anguished soul,
Nor let Distraction's billows o'er me roll!
Have mercy, Heaven, when here I cease to live,
And this last act of wretchedness forgive.⁽¹⁷⁾

As he was dying he destroyed all of Rowley's poems then in his possession; and when the door was broken open they found the floor of the room where he lay covered with scattered fragments of manuscripts.



II

CAN this strange history be reduced to an intelligible explanation? Chatterton's former biographers could find none, and helplessly ascribed the moving force to genius—or the devil. Many of the early critics—even Southey, in 1803—felt that only insanity explained the case. They knew that there was insanity in the family; that news of her son's death induced in his mother a nervous affection; that his sister and his niece were at some later time confined to a madhouse. The biographers considered the violence of the poet's brief life, and death. They recalled the amazing accomplishment of his genius. They thought of the thin partitions dividing great wit from madness. *Ergo*, Chatterton was mad; and "this," concludes Southey, "is the key to the eccentricities of his life and the deplorable rashness of his death."⁽¹⁸⁾ Recent biographers have noted the possibility of a tainted heredity, but have either glossed over the statement or ignored its implications.

What actually happened to Chatterton's mind during the complete break-down of his ventures after August 12th, we shall never know. In *The Anatomy of Suicide* Dr. Winslow concludes his study of Chatterton's mental conditions during his last weeks:

. . . No one acquainted with the history of this unfortunate youth would doubt for one moment that he was insane. Chatterton possessed naturally acute sensibilities; he was unquestion-

36 ably a man of genius. [Now] his mind received a rude shock; friend after friend forsook him. . . . The world which had been so eager to court his society and friendship, turned its back upon him; misfortunes followed in rapid succession, until he was frenzied by mental agony and physical suffering. At the time of his death he was in want of the common necessities of life. . . . Under such circumstances it is not surprising that poor Chatterton's mind should have been overthrown, and that he should have been led to commit suicide. . . . One very important fact connected with Chatterton's case ought to be borne in mind—viz., that insanity was in his family.⁽¹⁹⁾

Certainly in the light of evidence the author's summary seems justified, although we hesitate a moment over the final diagnosis. Yet since 1840 a clearer understanding of the problems of abnormal mentality has shown that mental disturbance is a condition of many stages. Chatterton's history reveals him as possessing keener sensibilities than those usually considered normal, and yet certainly not so sharply divorced from ordinary conduct as to deserve the label of madness. He seems rather to fit into that unclear state which lies between real psychosis and abnormality and partakes a little of the nature of each. Here belong not only psychotic and unstable personalities, but also those of that slightly abnormal or neurotic condition who show "a series of sharply emphasized traits of character which exceed the normal standard."⁽²⁰⁾ Discussed from such an angle, it might be possible to discover an equation for Chatterton's strange diversities.

The Marvelous Boy

Adlerian psychology⁽²¹⁾ seems to offer an available 37
mode of attack. According to Adler the neurotic
mind, the sensitive introspective intelligence, at a very
early age becomes aware of the conditions which sur-
round it. Every individual owns some ultimate pur-
pose, some end towards which the intelligence strug-
gles willfully for the perfection of the personality.
Occasionally the subconscious mind will perceive that
this goal is menaced by certain circumstances of ex-
istence. Then, in the neurotic disposition, even in
childhood there arises a definite reaction of uncon-
scious anxiety for the threatened goal—a revulsion
described as “the craving for security.”

Primarily, this striving results from some combina-
tion of circumstances which has so affected the in-
dividual as to produce a feeling of personal weakness,
of uncertainty, of inferiority. This combination may
be ordered by factors of environment, although often
it is the result of early physical defects and predis-
position to weakness. But however this feeling of in-
feriority arises in the individual it quickly becomes
the taproot of his characteristics, which develop
therefrom in various directions either with the pur-
pose of confirming the universal craving for security
or as a defense mechanism to prevent the degradation
of the personality. For, as Hadfield puts it, “as all
nature abhors a vacuum so every organism abhors
incompleteness.”⁽²²⁾ In mankind, whenever society
fails to provide necessary means for preventing this
condition the individual himself rallies every personal
resource and ability to insure his superiority over an
unsympathetic environment, that in the end he may

38 attain the self-realization which life seems likely to deny him. Naturally the combination of resulting traits varies with individual differences of personality; nor may any set grouping of characteristics be expected, since these also would be governed by special circumstances as well as by the degree of the personality difficulties. There are, nevertheless, certain conspicuous traits which appear so regularly that they may be regarded as generally symptomatic of the condition.

Often these "guiding principles" appear in childhood, for youth reflects the neurotic struggle for superiority quite as definitely as does maturity. Of these, the most impressive to the audience is "the will to power," which through ambition (and its derivatives, pride and dogmatism) aims to secure for the neurotic a superior position in any situation involving him. Pride, as it happens, was Chatterton's most marked characteristic. Whatever other qualities his family and friends failed to discern in him, they unanimously recorded the arrogance, the assurance, the aspiration which dominated every moment of his life.

A further detailing of the possible neurotic development reads like an abstract of Chatterton's biography. The child who labors under a feeling of uncertainty and inferiority will (as we know Chatterton did) copy the mannerisms of the adult, that he may the sooner realize the privilege and dignity of man's estate. As he grows older, he bends every energy to his work, fearing to lose success through lack of effort. He reads widely, to place himself on an equality with

adults. He insists on his own dignity and powers, 39 that he may impress his importance on others; he assumes leadership among his fellows, the only position that should be his. He is scrupulously a lover of truth, because this displays his personal integrity.⁽²³⁾ He exhibits the deepest devotion to his family, for its protection offers a precious refuge from the disturbing social contacts and problems of the outer world. Sometimes in the midst of an otherwise rational ordering of his life he will suddenly become—from the standpoint of worldly wisdom—audaciously reckless, in order thereby to convince himself that he has achieved some determined goal. One other development noticeable in some cases always strikes an observer as ridiculous; but, for all that, it renders valuable assistance in the battle for superiority. This is a pompous insistence upon dignity of family and ancestry not warranted by facts; but none the less stubbornly—however unjustifiably—asserted.

In the process of asserting his personality the neurotic even calls upon what seem negative methods of enhancing his self-esteem, and here again the abstract description tallies perfectly with Chatterton's portrait. One of these expedients is a tendency to satire, whereby the individual heightens his own feeling of power and influence by degrading and belittling others. This desire to improve one's situation is also the source of that yielding to abstraction which in its greatest degree results in a psychic compensation enabling the unhappy subject to escape from hard or dull reality to some pleasant dream world, where he achieves a second-hand security sufficient to bring

40 relief from the pressure of the actual. In this dream existence the individual evolves a symbolic style for himself and his experiences—an “abstracting fiction” which provides him with a means of transportation between the real and the ideal planes. This particular tendency manifests itself at a very early age, and proceeds steadily in the direction of an idea which naturally, in the child, takes a primitive turn and therefore regularly finds concrete embodiment in the form of an imaginary person.

To the negative methods of enhancing the individual's self-esteem may also be assigned other neurotic characteristics of radical thought, careless dress, indifference to diet—contrary behavior which emphasizes the difference between the subject and his superiors. At the same time, abstemious habits may be motivated by another purpose, incredible as that intention seems to a normal mind: for asceticism is also “a self-torturing expedient whose purpose is to enhance the feeling of personal esteem,”⁽²⁴⁾ even at the subject's expense. So occasionally he proceeds to devices even more severe, achieving through the spiritual discipline of self-torture a point of view which if applied to Chatterton's case offers the only plausible explanation for the abject letter to Barrett (see p. 26).

It is the most abnormal of all attitudes, for it employs the martyr's method of self-execration, and self-reproach; of self-castigation even to the length of suicide. At the same time this last contrivance may also have presented itself independently as a desirable act because against the neurotic feeling of uncertainty

it is the most extreme protective measure possible, 41 since it alone insures safety against further humiliation, though the cost be complete withdrawal from life. Because of its very finality suicide may appeal to the neurotic as the perfect solution for his case. The idea therefore is probably present in the mind even before its actual accomplishment, existing there with less strength or as an unconscious repressed tendency, merely waiting for a motive sufficiently compelling to bring the unrealized concept to consciousness. Once risen to the surface of the neurotic mind, suicide ingratiate itself with the desperate as the only desirable method of adjusting the particular crisis where old habits or attempted accommodations have proved inadequate, where in consequence continuation of existence is actually threatened.

If under the Adlerian theory Chatterton could be classified as neurotic, the diagnosis would provide a logical interpretation, as well as the only complete one, for the direction of his genius; and to identify him thus seems by the preceding analysis to be entirely justified. Not one of his remarkable traits but can be definitely associated with some neurotic abnormality, whether the characteristic is personal or literary. So far as it is possible to trace a cause for Chatterton's initial feeling of inferiority, there is no reference in any of the records to early illness or physical disability (which Adler believes usually forms the basis of youthful uncertainty); yet it is probable that in Chatterton's case the environmental conditions of his first years were such as might easily have induced the mood in a sensitive child. It

42 should be remembered that Chatterton's father died suddenly four months before the poet was born, and that not long after his birth Mrs. Chatterton was forced to leave her home, since that was the perquisite of the new master of the school where her husband had taught. The young widow (she was barely twenty-one) was burdened with the support of two small children, and racked with the devising of plans to earn a living for her family. The boy's strange gloomy ways stirred only her impatience, for she lacked the necessary leisure and wisdom to deal sympathetically with him. When reproaches failed to rouse him she tried sharpness, although after her fashion she was a careful mother; but she was mentally incapable of understanding him, and was never able to give him the help or guidance he needed.

Assuming a neurotic basis for Chatterton's mind, the fact that he began to write satirically at an age when other young poets choose the simplicity of pastoral composition becomes intelligible. That he wrote the later satires like *Resignation* and *Kew Gardens* is not primarily significant, because as he read more widely he must have become aware that satire was a literary fashion of the time. Yet even in these poems the neurotic elements appear in the incessant slurs and often undeserved aspersions on Bristol men which Chatterton continually intrudes into larger discussions ostensibly concerning general English political conditions. The most important evidence that his satire was an emotional vent is found in *The Exhibition*, which can have no other excuse for being. That here the satire is both reckless and particularly

odious may also be attributed to the degree of his 43
neurosis at that special time. He wrote the verses
laboring under the high excitement of his first weeks
in London. "London! Good God! how superior is
London to that despicable place Bristol! Here is none
of your little meannesses, none of your mercenary
securities, which disgrace that miserable hamlet!"—
he wrote three days after completing *The Exhibition*.
He could best emphasize his success to himself by
indulging (at last) the wild contempt he felt for "the
most perfect masters of human nature in Bristol."
The poem could not have been intended for publica-
tion; but equally as reckless as its composition was
the fact that he sent it home to his intimate, Cary.
This would show Cary, too—and any other friends
with whom Cary might share the communication—
that the author was too successful now to need
guarded speech towards his late superiors. Bristol's
first citizens could stew in their own juice, so far as
Chatterton was concerned: he was out of their clutches
and beyond their power at last.

The poet himself was conscious that sometimes his
satiric phrases were involuntary, rather than calcu-
lated. In the semi-apology he addressed to Alex-
ander Catcott for the criticism leveled against Cat-
cott and his works, in the *Epistle* of December 6, 1769,
he suggested the fact. "I have taken great poetical
liberties, and what I dislike in verse possibly deserves
my approbation in the plain prose of truth." In his
Will of April 14, 1770, Chatterton restates this atti-
tude more clearly: "I wish that he⁽²⁵⁾ and his brother
George would know how far I am their real enemy;

- 44 but I have an unlucky way of raillery, and when the strong fit of satire is on me I spare neither friend nor foe." Several lines in the first part of *The Whore of Babylon* he used again when he rewrote the poem into the closing portion of *Kew Gardens*. They reveal his arrogance, his self-esteem, his resentment towards Bristol, as well as the impulsive momentary quality of his criticisms:

Damn'd narrow Notions! tending to disgrace
The boasted Reason of the Human Race.
Bristol may keep her prudent Maxims still,
But know, my saving Friends, I never will.
The Composition of my Soul is made
Too great for servile, avaricious Trade:
When raving in the Lunacy of Ink
I catch the Pen, and publish what I think.

Not only may the general tone of the satires be accounted for by the emotional reactions of the poet, but with neurotic or pathological mental habits as a determined condition, the creation of Rowley becomes natural and comprehensible. Rowley's world was a dream-state in which the poet sought refuge whenever reality became too difficult or disappointing. Here he could find security; here he walked as equal with that great Maistre Canynge beside whose honored tomb he had so often played. For "Thomas Rowley, secular priest," was himself, Thomas Chatterton—did he not wear the tonsure and the antique blue gown of Colston's? Was not Colston's itself built on the ruins of an old Carmelite priory? So in his reveries he paced like a true friar through churchly shadows resembling his beloved St. Mary Redcliffe

The Marvelous Boy

back into the time when the earliest chapel was reared 45
on that site; and as he pierced through the mists into
an elder and more golden England, Maistre Canynge
rose from his tomb to wander with him in the search
for their old companions. He and Canynge were the
only living actors in the play. The others were spirits
who had never known an earthly existence; but yet
so dear to him that he could vision them clearly in
their habits as they lived. It was better for his fancy
to dwell in peace among them than for his alien spirit
to endure consciously the stolid routine of a charity
school.

Even after he went into Lambert's service the boy
continued to take refuge in Rowley's world, which
also furnished him with welcome gifts for the older
friends he wanted to please. But when Walpole's ill
usage and Phillips' death at last brought the real
world crashing down, Rowley withdrew into his shad-
ows, for the poet's wounded spirit needed deeper
comfort than the gentle priest could offer. Nor did
Rowley return until the first disillusioned days in
London. Then, because each week was bringing dis-
turbance of evidence of danger ahead, Rowley visited his
creator only long enough for Chatterton to console
himself by setting down the verses celebrating that
true charity which could not be found in London.

To reduce the satires and the Rowley poems to
their neurotic origins does not in any way affect their
'great literary value. No mere fact of causation could
destroy the strength and power of *Resignation*. Noth-
ing can mar the beautiful serenity of the poem *On*
Hapiness—"All hayle, contente, thou mayde of tur-

Thomas Chatterton

46 tle-eyne"—or chill the inspiration of lines like these,
from the *Battle of Hastings*, II:

And now the greie-eyd morne with vi'lets drest,
Shakyng the dewdrops on the flourie meedes,
Fled with her rosie radiance to the West:
Forth from the Easterne gatte the fyerie steedes
Of the bright sunne awaytynge spirits leedes:
The sunne, in fierie pompe enthroned on hie,
Swyfter than thoughte along hys jernie gledes,
And scatters nyghtes remaynes from oute the
skie:

He sawe the armies make for bloodie fraie,
And stopt his driving steedes, and hid his lyght-
some raye.

To point out the neurosis underlying Chatterton's work is only to reconcile the remarkable contrasts of mood and matter in his poetry. At the same time it gives an answer once and for all to the question of the "Rowley forgeries." Rowley's ghost was laid long ago, but the ethical problem of the forgeries still remains a critical stumbling-block. To be sure, modern criticism has adopted a more charitable attitude than was Horace Walpole's when he wrote that

. . . all the house of forgery are relations;
and though it be just to Chatterton's memory to say his poverty never made him claim kindred with the richest or more enriching branches, yet his ingenuity in counterfeiting styles, and, I believe, hands, might easily have led him to those more facile imitations of prose, promissory notes.⁽²⁶⁾

If proof of the neurotic inception of the Rowley poems is not sufficient evidence to disprove the crimi-

nal intention of the Rowley fiction, reference to a case strangely parallel to Chatterton's may be more convincing. It is cited by Prince as an "exquisite illustration" of the disposition complex resulting from a neurotic splitting of consciousness, and concerns the late William Sharp:

. . . William Sharp's title to literary fame very largely rests upon the writings which he gave to the world under the feminine name of Fiona Macleod. The identity of the author was concealed from the world until his death, and it is still a common belief that this concealment and the assumption of the feminine pseudonym were nothing more than a literary hoax. Nothing could be farther from the truth. There were two William Sharps; by which I mean, of course, there were two very strongly organized and sharply cut sides to his character. Each had its points of view, its complexes of ideas, its imaginings, and above all its creative tendencies. . . . The one side—the one christened William Sharp—was the bread and butter earner, the relatively practical man who came in contact with the world. . . . The other side—Fiona Macleod—was the so-called inner man; what he called his "true inward self."

. . . The development of this side of his personality began while, as he said, "I was still a child." "He found," his biographer writes, "as have other imaginative psychic children, that he had an inner life, a curious power of vision unshared by any one about him, so that what he related was usually discredited; but the psychic side of his nature was too intimate a part of his mind to be killed by misunderstanding. He learned to shut it away—to keep it as a thing apart—a mystery of his own, a mystery to himself."⁽²⁷⁾

48 It was fortunate for Sharp that he left behind no Walpole to traduce his memory. By 1905, however, science had advanced sufficiently to direct Sharp's critics to a proper and intelligent appreciation of his psychic difficulties. Neither was it ever considered a moral weakness that Sharp was conscious of his double personality and yet during his lifetime willfully and elaborately concealed the truth of his identity with Fiona Macleod.

Chatterton's reputation has too long endured the criminal reproach of "forgery." Adler's psychology seems—when applied to this case—to offer through neurosis the possibility of a more intelligent explanation for the Rowley poems. The fact of Chatterton's genius remains undisturbed; nevertheless, in neurosis will probably be found the much-needed key to the puzzle of his poetry, as well as a plausible explanation for the creation of Rowley himself.

The Marvelous Boy

Notes

Page

- 10 (1) Skeat-Bell, *Complete Works of Thomas Chatterton*, 1871, I, xcvi. 49
- 12 (2) William Barrett, *The History and Antiquities of the City of Bristol*, Bristol, 1789, pp. 19-20. In this connection it is interesting to recall that Thomas Chatterton, in some of the Rowley records, wrote at length of the "auncient coynes found at and near Bristowe," and with apparent knowledge described ancient types of money.
- 12 (3) John Dix, *Life of Chatterton*, 1837, p. 5. In the body of this paper no use (with the exception of this statement, which is thoroughly in accord with other evidence) has been made of this volume because of its indiscriminate mingling of reliable and questionable material.
- 13 (4) Herbert Croft, *Love and Madness*, London, 1780, p. 143.
- 13 (5) "Perhaps the bent of most men's studies may, in some measure, be determined by accident, and frequently in very early life; nor is it unreasonable to suppose that his peculiar attachment to antiquities may, in a considerable degree, have resulted from this little circumstance." G. Gregory, *Life of Chatterton*, 1789, p. 5.
- 13 (6) This continued depression was noticeable until his twelfth year. His sister writes (*Love and Madness*, p. 144): "He had been gloomy from the time he began to learn, but we remark'd he was more chearfull after he began to write poetry. Some saterical peicis we saw soon after."
- 13 (7) *Love and Madness*, p. 144.
- 14 (8) Osbert Burdett, *William Blake*, New York, 1926, p. 25.

Thomas Chatterton

Page

- 50 16 (9) Gregory, *Life of Chatterton*, pp. 17-18.
- 20 (10) *Love and Madness*, p. 145.
- 23 (11) The indebtedness of these lines to Gray's *Elegy* is interesting.
- 29 (12) The material in this and the next paragraph is quoted or paraphrased from *Love and Madness*, pp. 189-193.
- 31 (13) *Love and Madness*, p. 192.
- 33 (14) James Thistlethwaite to Dr. Milles, in Jeremiah Milles, *Commentary on Rowley's Poems*, 1782, p. 245. Chatterton's sister told Sir Herbert Croft (*Love and Madness*, p. 145): "Mr. Barrett lent him many books on surgery and I beleive he bought many more as I remember to have packt them up to send to him when in London and no demand was ever made for them."
- 33 (15) Forbes Winslow, *The Anatomy of Suicide*, London, 1840, p. 245. There is no other trace of this letter, which seems to have been lost since Dr. Winslow quoted from it. No other commentator has referred to it; but there is possible confirmation for its existence in Dix, *Life of Chatterton*, p. 311, where Mrs. Edkins states: "A week before the news of Chatterton's death reached his mother she had received a letter from him, and sent for Mrs. Edkins to read it to her. She was in tears and very uneasy . . ."
- 34 (16) *Love and Madness*, pp. 194-195.
- 35 (17) Another poem found in Chatterton's room just after his death is given in Dix, *Life of Chatterton*, pp. 306-7. It is interesting to compare the two for their diversities as well as similarities; but each is charged with the same feeling of distracted and hopeless despair.

The Marvelous Boy

Page

35 (18) Robert Southey to John Britton, Nov. 4, 1810. 51

This letter, which seems not to have been included in collected editions of Southey's letters, is now in the possession of The Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, through whose courtesy I have secured a copy of it.

Keswick—Nov. 4, 1810

Dear Sir:

Accept my thanks for the three prints of Redcliffe Church, & for the honour you have done me in one of them. It is a building from which I have derived, from my earliest childhood as many feelings probably as Chatterton himself, with the addition of such as his memory has associated with it.

I wish it were in my power to furnish you with any information to your purpose. But with regard to the church itself I have only looked at it to admire it,—never as an antiquarian. You know probably that the old ceremony of strewing the church on Palm Sunday is still observed there,—I know not whether it be retained any where else in England,—but I have seen it there some four or six & twenty years ago, when it never failed to draw together a great crowd.

The Rowley question has long been dismissed from my thoughts. In fact since I had the slightest acquaintance with old English literature I was perfectly convinced that it was utterly impossible the poems could be genuine. I will however mention one decisive argument, which I owe to a friend. The little facsimile of Canynge's feast contains manifest proofs that the hand-writing is feigned, for if you examine it you will find that the letter e is written in some eighteen or twenty different ways. It may be worth while to avail

yourself of the observation, and exhibit all the varieties, a glance at them will settle the question.

Now also there can be no impropriety in mentioning what could not be said when the collected edition of Chatterton's works was published,—that there was a taint of insanity in his family. His sister was once confined,—& this is a key to the eccentricities of his life, & to the deplorable rashness of his death.

I have heard persons who remember him say that he was at one time a great coxcomb in his dress.

Of the honour which he has gained in his own country, there is one whimsical instance. Ten years ago, a Leathern-Breeches Maker & Undertaker had upon his shop card an Urn "sacred to the memory of Chatterton." One of these cards is penes me, as the phrase is,—& perhaps Mr. Haslewood in his extraordinary collection upon this subject has nothing more curious.

I am Sir

Yrs. truly,

Robert Southey

- 36 (19) *The Anatomy of Suicide*, pp. 244–5.
- 36 (20) Adler, *The Neurotic Constitution*, p. 4.
- 37 (21) The discussion on pp. 37–41 is based closely on material in Adler, *The Neurotic Constitution*; Freud-Brill, *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*; Prince, *The Unconscious*.
- 37 (22) J. G. Hadfield, *Psychology and Morals*, New York, 1925, p. 82.
- 39 (23) Chatterton's sister wrote to Sir Herbert Croft (*Love and Madness*, p. 144): "He was a lover of truth from the earliest dawn of reason, and nothing would move him so much as being bely'd. When in the school we were informed by the

The Marvelous Boy

Page

usher, his master depended on his veracity on all occasions." 53

40 (24) Adler, *The Neurotic Constitution*, p. 42.

43 (25) i. e., Alexander Catcott.

46 (26) "A letter to the Editor of the Miscellanies of Thomas Chatterton," reprinted from the edition of 1779, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, April, 1782, III, p. 194.

47 (27) Morton Prince, *The Unconscious*, New York, 1914, pp. 296-7.



“*The Vengeance of the Lifted Quill*”⁽¹⁾

THE EXHIBITION

A PERSONAL SATYR

May 1–May 3, 1770

IN 1802 George Symes Catcott (who then owned 55 the ms.) objected to the inclusion of *The Exhibition* in the Southey-Cottle edition of *Chatterton's Works*, in a letter now in the Sholto Vere Hare-White collection at the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. The satire had been described as indecent by Gregory in 1789; and in 1795 in the article on Chatterton in Anderson's *British Poets* series, volume XI, had been characterized as “too indecent for publication.” (At that time, incidentally, many of the people mentioned in the poem were still alive.) This too was probably stated on the authority of Catcott.

In 1869 Professor Wilson, a conservative and somewhat unfriendly critic of Chatterton, wrote of *The Exhibition* that “it would have been well had it perished, with its evidence that youthful purity had been sullied, and the precocious boy⁽²⁾ was only too conversant with forbidden things.”⁽³⁾ In 1871 Pro-

56 fessor Skeat in the Skeat-Bell edition of Chatterton's poems followed this view, quoting Wilson's verdict and re-printing from Wilson 14 lines of the satire referring to Alexander Catcott, George Symes Catcott's brother. Not until 1910 was more of the poem published, when Ingram presented it in part in *The True Chatterton*, omitting some 160 lines of the 445. His excisions, however, destroyed any understanding of the poem as a whole.

The history of the ms. itself presents a problem. What has become of the original autograph of Chatterton? A present text must depend on the copy now owned by the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, a text which seems to be a hasty, careless "transcript, probably in [G. S.] Catcott's handwriting,"⁽⁴⁾ badly punctuated and misspelled. Yet why, if Catcott disapproved of the satire to the extent of preventing its publication, should he have taken the trouble to copy it? There is a possible explanation for his action, although it sheds no light on the fate of the original MS. Russell's *Thomas Chatterton* (1908, p. 227) refers—on what authority I do not know, since I have found no other mention of it—to the traffic of two of Chatterton's older friends in Bristol—William Barrett, the medical antiquary and George Symes Catcott—who during the last quarter of the Eighteenth century transcribed the unpublished poems of Chatterton which they owned, selling the duplicates to collectors. There is the added particular statement confirming the practice that "within two or three years after Chatterton's death the Earl of Lichfield possessed a good collection of these copies

of Catcott and Barrett." One wonders, nevertheless, how *The Exhibition*, which Chatterton sent from London to a young friend in Bristol—Thomas Cary—first came into Catcott's observation and possession. 57

In considering the theme of the satire it should be remembered that during his later years at home Chatterton read medicine with William Barrett, and that in Barrett's home he probably became acquainted with the Bristol medical fraternity through gossip or actual intercourse. Thus there is little evidence, as Wilson would have it, of precocity in the choice of theme: for one of Chatterton's younger friends, James Thistlethwaite, told Dean Milles that "even physic was not without a charm to allure [Chatterton's] imagination, and he would talk of Galen, Hippocrates, and Paracelsus, with all the confidence and familiarity of a modern empirick."⁽⁵⁾

To the modern critic of Chatterton *The Exhibition* will stand as a measure of emotion, not as a foot-rule for character, because in estimating it he will consider the conditions under which it was written as well as the nature of the satire. Chatterton dashed off the verses in three days early in May of 1770, when he had been less than two weeks in London. He was fresh from the bondage of "Bristol's mercenary walls" and exulting in his new-found freedom and success. On May 6th, three days after he completed the satire, he wrote to his mother: "—there I was out of my element; now I am in it—London! Good God! how superior is London to that despicable place Bristol! Here is none of your little meannesses, none

58 of your mercenary securities, which disgrace that miserable hamlet."

Barely three weeks earlier the despair and humiliation which he felt implicit in his Bristol situation had goaded him to active preparation for suicide. That deep emotional disturbance had been followed by an equally intense ecstasy, for the discovery of his evident intention—although it brought down on the poet the disgust and heavy displeasure of his immediate superiors—effected his unexpected release from the apprenticeship articles which were holding him in Bristol. Bristol, with its scolding elders—then London, from which shortly afterwards he could write to his sister: "I have a universal acquaintance; my company is courted everywhere!"

Viewed in relation to its circumstances *The Exhibition* appears as an explosion touched off by the swift and profound revulsion of feelings which had searched Chatterton to his emotional depths. Never before, or afterward, so far as is known, did the poet develop a lewd subject at length. *The Whore of Babylon*, and its later form, *Kew Gardens*, in general uses personal innuendo for political purposes, after the satiric fashion of the time; while his sophisticated pot-boilers like *Maria Friendless* or *The False Step* bear the mild stamp of imitative concoction. Indeed, proof that the spleen of *The Exhibition* is due to a sudden outburst of passion appears in the fact that to widen its devastating reach Chatterton borrowed from his own *Kew Gardens*, completed earlier in the year, some forty consecutive lines (*Exhibition*, 330–343 and 407–432) in which he had already set down

The Marvelous Boy

caustic opinions of certain other eminent Bristolians. 59
It is as if he wanted to score off all the "Bristol gang"
—bad and good—at one very fell swoop.

Because the satire is never flagrantly lax, the tone of the poem seems vitriolic, rather than vicious; excited, rather than calculated in its purpose. A bitter outraged hostility fills the lines, a sense of protest and of personal anger at the situation described—of whose truth, it must be admitted, no one has ever testified, although the circumstantial air of the narrative lends it the feeling of reality. Neither do we know definitely if Chatterton designed the satire for other than circulation "among his private friends." Surely this would have served any intention he could have had in its composition. What other aim have the verses than to point out that the men against whom *The Exhibition* is directed, the leading citizens of Bristol sheltering one of their own group in his iniquity, these "most perfect masters of human nature" (as he had called them in his *Will*) are in reality but baser metal? And these are they who so scornfully regarded the young poet for his liberal and unconventional views,—him, Chatterton, in mind and person so much their superior. From his seemingly secure eminence in London where now a universal acquaintance courted his company he posted the verses home to Thomas Cary, the one friend of his own age who seems to have been in Chatterton's intimate confidence. He who best knew what slights the poet had endured from Bristol's leading citizens could best appreciate the gesture of retaliation.

- 60 The complete text here presented through the courtesy of the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery is unemended from the transcript in their possession. In a few instances where a later hand has filled in the name blanks, the names are given just as written in. For lines 19, 101, 176 and 284 Ingram in 1910 offered certain identifications.⁽⁶⁾

Notes

Page

- 53 (1) *The Exhibition*, line 168.
53 (2) Chatterton was hardly a boy in May, 1770. He was then aged 17 years 6 months.
53 (3) *Chatterton: A Biographical Study*, by Daniel Wilson, London, 1868, p. 201.
54 (4) *Catalogue of the Chatterton collection in the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery*, p. 20.
55 (5) Quoted in *Chatterton's Works*, edited by Southey and Cottle, London, 1803, III, p. 471.
58 (6) *The True Chatterton*, by John H. Ingram, London, 1910, pp. 296-304.

The Marvelous Boy

THE EXHIBITION*

Book 1st 61

A Personal Satyr May 1st, 1770

- Of Exhibitions infamous I sing
Not such as boast the presence of a King
Where miserable daubings envious vie
For the poor wonder of an Ideots Eye;
5. Where tawdry glare and despicable shew
Burlesque and Elegance to please a Beau
Not such as dignifies this rising land
Where Genius animates the Painters hand
Where all the excellence of real Taste
10. With ev'ry judgment but a King's is grac'd
The Exhibition which the Muse prepares
To please the Modest Virgin's eyes and ears
Soars above all the mimickry of art
Tis nature only stimulates the part
15. No imitative second means prevail
Ev'n Madam Gibson's gran'd Specifics fail
This truth, this mighty truth, if truth can shine
In the smooth polish of a labour'd Line
Calcott by sad Experience testifies,
20. And who shall tell a sabled Priest he lies
Bred to the juggling of the specious Band
Predestinated to adorn the Land
The selfish *Calcott* ripen'd to a priest,
And wore the sable livery of the Beast.
25. By Birth to Prejudice and whim ally'd
And heavy with hereditary Pride;
He modell'd pleasure by a Fossil rule,
And spent his Youth to prove himself a Fool

* Copyright—Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, England.

Thomas Chatterton

62

- Bury'd existence in a lengthning Cave
30. And lost in dreams whatever nature gave
What heeds the chastity of Ages past
If now the Parson longs and lusts at last
And tottring on the verge of threescore
He leaves his next Edition for a W——e
35. Loses the Argument and never hears
The *Hutchinsonian* jargon of the Spheres
Ah! what avails it if his pious look
Would angelize the Sacerdotal Book
If even Pulpits might receive an Awe
From the low Notes which slumber thro' his
Law
If holy Gospel might be dignified
By his set Phiz austerity and Pride
How can these attributes be sound within
When Satan tempts the inward man to sin
45. Fly hence Temptation *Catcott's* heavenly Heart
Is never mov'd but in the better part
Devotion only warms his freezing blood
Lust never melted up the sizy flood
And should his lost degeneracy of mind
50. Be to the pleasures of the World inclind,
Sickly desire is all his little crime
For *Catcott's* stretchd beyond his toying time
Like his dull brother frigid cold and dead
He'd sleep unsullied in a Harlot's Bed
55. And in defiance of the stroaking hand
His matters like his reason would not stand
But since of Clerical degree some few,
Have serv'd the flesh, and servd the Spirit
too

The Marvelous Boy

63

- Since vers'd in all varieties of Vice,
60. Hell gave us *Broughton* and Heaven gave us
Price
That ones devotion so had God decreed
Should counteract the others evil deed
And when the reverend Rector undertook,
To curse a Harlot by the Bell and Book
65. The other might the Plumes of mercy spread
And take the wandring sinner to his Bed.
Hail pious B——— could the author hope
For the high slight of metaphor or Trope,
To reach the summitt of thy hellish crimes,
70. And stamp thee infamous to after times:
The rapid Muse should urge the hasty flight,
And vengeance in the garb of Genius write
But rest contented in thy little State,
Great Villains are above the reach of Fate
75. Offer'd to party little Rascalls fall
While greater Rascalls bear the prize of all:
When justice lingers to curtail thy days
Live murderers live, in your Protectors praise
Since the nice Conscience of Iscarriotts Son
80. Did what the soul of B——— would have
done
Since the great curse Episcopacy spread
Its baleful poisons from the Fountain head
Has Christianity a glorious name:
A Priest so skilful in the Arts of shame
85. Whose little soul with every meanness staid
Is in a constant course of vice maintain'd,
Since sicken'd Fancy's wild intrusions brought
Contagious whims a Pestilence of thought:

Thomas Chatterton

- 64 First in the Cells of monkish dullness bred
90. And sent into the World without a head,
Has Corcat Wilkins, or the dreaming tribe
Who Revelations Fairy Tales transcribe,
Equall'd great B———— in his Fustian line
For nonsense and Absurdities divine
95. For false conclusions mysteries of sense
To which an Oracle might make pretence
Immortal as the soul his fame shall live
And an eternal fund for laughter give
A standing jest for Warburton and Louth
100. And a hot custard in the Doctor's mouth.
Enough of B———— P———— now sweeps
along
Rich with the Flattry of Celestial Song
And whilst he searches for another prize
Only to feed his Sacerdotal Eyes
105. Forgets his curate may at home employ
The precious Minutes in a Heav'nly joy
O could I speak the matter plainly out
But this may now suffice, that Horns will
sprout
'Tis known I reverence the sacred black
110. Tho' on an Ideot's or a Villan's Back
Newton's a Bishop at the awful Name
I give him all his literary Fame
Own his prophetic Influence and rejoice
That wisdom can exalt her mighty voice
115. And whilst the Sacerdotal Lawn I eye
Thro' that mysterious Fashion of the sky
I cannot see the reverend Prelate dull
A blinded prejudice and cheated Gull.

The Marvelous Boy

120. Cloath'd in each attribute of Hell is seen 65
The awkward Figure of a Bristol Dean.
Barton the holy B———— who presides
Over the conscience of the thing that guides
Spite of the many vices which I trace
In the Black index of his ample face
125. Spite of his sleeping indolence and ease
I view him in his Clerical degrees
See his devotion in his drunken look
His piety in his unopen'd Book
His Christian patience in the Oaths he swears,
130. And all his many virtues in his Heirs
Camplin How shall I justly state the case
Between thy pride of heart, and pride of face
Thy haughty accent must bespeak at least
A Soul above the common run of Priest
135. And then, oh gracious Heaven, thy haughty
stride
Would grace a Bishop with a proper pride
Thou too art sabled, but the conscious line
Will honour merit, tho' it shou'd be thine
Whilst none thy powerful arguments will scan
140. But loose the preacher to observe the Man
This truth the Muses shall proclaim aloud
That ————— is, as sensible as proud,
What means this throng this multitude of
Fools
Who square their actions by anothers rules?
145. 'Tis *Stonehouse* preaches; Gods! let fame resound
The tidings to the brandy Cellars round
The specious oracle, the Man of Noise
The Admiration of all Fools and Boys

Thomas Chatterton

- 66 Who finds out meanings, (if his talk can
 mean)
150. In Texts which Wesley dropt and left to glean
 Dry beats a Sentence racks each Eastern Trope
 Nor hesitates betwixt a Sandy rope;
 Robbs Jacob Behmen of his Magic Wit
 And unwrites all that Jacob Behmen writ
155. ——— the Jesuitical the small
 The hot enthusiast the crown of all
 So inconsistent with himself and vain
 I strive to wound him with Satyric strain
 Shou'd I attempt his Bottle to revoke
160. He's gone; and long back'd Williams has the
 stroke
 Should I attempt his Mistress to entice
 He's gone again; the satire falls on Price
 If blam'd for Cards, and swearing, and all that
 Still he alludes and shifts it to De Bat.
165. Then if accus'd of varying in his part
 Presto he's fled; and lo I've wounded hart.
 This Harlequin of sacred things will still
 Elude the Vengeance of the lifted Quill.
 And hid behind his Brethren of the Gown
170. Escape the dubious blow, and cheat the Town
 Robins if Curates starv'd and pray'd away
 In the long labour of a Sabbath day
 May hear the honour to be rank'd with those
 Who rule the roast, and lead them by the Nose,
175. R——— that Pulpit Fribble may be told,
 The blessing of a B——— must be sold
 The whining Cant, the shrill religious squeak
 In which the reverend Molly learns to speak

The Marvelous Boy

Wont gain the flinty heart, which B———— 67
wears

180. That heart more harden'd by the Widow's
Tears

Enough of Rectors, Curates, Curates Whores'
Thin peopled Pews, and thronging Peoples
Doors

Now to the Exhibition we proceed
And let the reader who can read it read

185. O Thou immortal power, whose force is such
Thy Attributes are never known too much
Before whose Altar in the Mystic Rite,
The Priest and Priestess sacredly unite
When the strong rapture tickles thro the deep

190. And every lesser sense is hush'd to sleep
With honest indignation nobly fill
My consecrated my revengeful quill
Let me in strains which Heaven itself indites
Display the Rascals who abuse thy Rites

195. Let me with fury throw the numbers round
And spend my Vengeance smoaking on the
Ground

Flying on silken wings of dusty Grey,
The cooling evening clos'd a sultry day
The Cit walk'd out to Arno's dusty Vale

200. To take a smack of Politicks and Ale
Whilst rock'd in clumsy Coach about the Town
The prudent Mayor jogg'd his Dinner down
Close as a Statesman in his secret plot
Of Incidents and things which matter not.

205. Close as a Lawyer's mouth till fully paid
In the dark covert of a shed array'd

Thomas Chatterton

- 68 Delia the Young saw mighty ——— stand
 His sacerdotal Trunchion in his hand
 Which as he wisk'd about from side to side
210. In the exulting of a decent pride
 By just degrees to greater glory spread
 And the Bright jewel glow'd a stronger red
 Why modest ——— didst thou creep away
 To hide they beauties from the glare of day
215. Merit like thine, so thick so very long
 If lost or hid it does the publick wrong
 Uncommon parts and blessings of the mind
 Were sent my friend to benefit mankind
 Full of the bristol merit something new,
220. Miss to her prudent Governante flew
 Expatriated on the matter seen,
 And shew'd what hung about, upon between
 Concluding with a wish: Oh could you see?
 And be as happy half so blest as me
225. The Lady trembled at the fatal news
 Gods; that a Man should thus good parts abuse
 My Coach! revenge, revenge, by every wrong
 I suffer by't, it shall not be so long
 The Physical old Women of the Town
230. Shall bring his rampart Exhibition down
 The modest Matron spread the Story round
 And passing Virgins ey'd the Youth renown'd
 The Members of the faculty began
 To sit upon the madness of the man
235. And Marshall'd round, a despicable ring
 Beneath the notice of the Bard to sing
 Smith was deputed in his Accent great
 Their Ladyship's Ambassador of State

The Marvelous Boy

69

To bring this culprit to the bar, and tell
240. The busy town without their help he fell.
The Council met, behold the Pris'ner stand
In all the horrors of the stretchd out hand
Stile silence reigns, when prating S——— be-
gins

To lay down all his Catalogue of sins
245. Ye children of corruption who are fed,
On the good fortune of a broken head
Whose rents are in the Stews, and never fail
As all your settlements are fix'd in Tail
Who live luxuriant on a rotten skin

250. And like the Devils Kingdoms thrive by Sin
To you ye Sons of torment I commend
Patience and vigilance untill I end
The Pris'ner at the Barr whose downcast face
Betrays some little marks of inward Grace

255. Has brought dishonour on our honourd name
And sold himself to infamy and shame
What! idly show those blessings Heav'n has
sent

For the Young Virgins feeling and content
And must the Eye alone be entertain'd
260. Was it for that the member was ordaind?
What benefit, what profit could accrue
Should every well hung Blockhead act like you
The faculty would live in State no more
And be perhaps, deservedly; be poor.

265. Poxes, Delivery's, a Train of ills
Which every solemn Doctor's Pocket fills
The various Pennances which wait the Guilt
On which our noble Faculty is built

Thomas Chatterton

- 70 Would sink to Atoms should your sect succeed,
270. And only Barber Surgeons purge and bleed.
 Once I confess it, burning with desire
 Hot in the furnace of a Youthful fire
 I ravish'd ay I ravish'd! but when then?
 That was a work and making work for men
275. There Peter sits a Veteran in his Trade,
 O! the fix'd resolution of his Blade!
 To every rule of Surgery unknown,
 But what the blockhead boasts of as his own
 He amputates and mangles without skill
280. Tis but common trifle should he kill
 Blund'ring when life is trembling on a thread
 And Adding mis'ry to the dying's Bed.
 Perhaps he errs but who can blame the man
 If he cant mend his Errors B———— can
285. And thus to play into a Brothers hand
 Is Charity and makes the calling stand
 Death is a very trifle in our trade
 A Pill mistaken or too keen a Blade
 He ended and as usual in his way
290. Could in long oration nothing say
 Empty and without meaning he display'd
 His Sire's loquacity, in his array'd.
 Barret arose and with a thundring Air
 Stretch'd out his arm, and dignify'd the chair
295. This madness unaccountable has long
 Best known in Bristol's best Record's a Song
 Who in Antiquity so little read
 Of all the learned Body round me spread
 But what has heard of the too cruel hap
300. Which caught an Exhibition in a Trap;

The Marvelous Boy

71

- When thro' a hole the mystic trefoil came
And struck astonishment into a Dame
Who soon recovering (for she knew the sight,)
Fix'd on a Mouse trap, and there held it tight.
305. Let me remark to ancient rules we own
All we of any mystery can know,
And by Antiquity I find that here
This vice was often suffer'd too appear
The penalty for those who could not pay
310. For those who could, might always get away
Was to be whip'd thro every street in Town
And thrice be pillor'd, with his Breeches down
But Esculapians tis beyond dispute
Mercy is heaven's supremest attribute
315. Else would this curst *Gomorrhah* feel the fire
Which their unmanly beastliness require
If *Barton* lives in Elegance and ease
Renown'd for robbing Curates of their fees
If the whole Court of Aldermen may still
320. Free and indicted exercise their will,
Shou'd ——— suffer, if disguis'd or mad
He shew'd the gazing Virgins what he had
Has not the Faculty in which he stands
One of the quickest, surest, finest hands
325. Has not the faculty refin'd the Town
And melted all their baser Metal down
O' Inspirations rising in my skull,
A certain token that the Moon's at full
Look to all learning elegance and sense
330. Long had this famous City told her pence
Avarice sad brooding in her white washd Cell
And pleasure had a Hut at Jacob's Well

Thomas Chatterton

72

- A mean assembly room absurdly built
Boasted one gorgeous lamp of Copper Guilt
335. With farthing Candles, Chandeliers of Tin
And services of Water, Rum and Gin,
Here in the dull solemnity of Wiggs
The dancing Bears of Commerce murderd Jiggs
Here danc'd the dowdy Belles of crooked
Trunk
340. And often very often reel'd home drunk
Here danc'd the Bucks, with infinite delight
And clubb'd to pay the Fidlers for the night
This was their elegance, their learning lay
Still farther distant from the present day
345. The Homebred documents of Old Sam Pye
Were standing Rules to dress their Buboes by
See the reverse the faculty began
To make the Selfish Bristol Hog a Man.
All are Physicians now the City thro'
350. The only Conversation's *how d'ye do?*
Enraptur'd with the Genius of a Donn
Who murders everything he writes upon
All Bristolls Intellectuals seek the skies
Reformd and Systematically wise
355. Perplex'd, amidst the planetary Land
They see and hear but never understand
But to the question let us bind him down
No more to shew his matters in the Town
Here *Worrall* bring a Bond, and this d'ye see
360. The Penalty make payable to me
He ended, and a Murmur of Applause
Drop'd from each Carcase Butchers wither'd
Jaws

The Marvelous Boy

From all but *Townsend* always T———— had 73

- A Soul for opposition, good or bad
365. Of Contrarities and whims compos'd
He never in a friendly treaty clos'd
He rose, a smile thro evry Feature spread
And gentle Blagden shook his empty head
And is this all shall then the beastly crew
370. Expose their Nudities to public View
What if that thing of flatulence and noise
Whose Surgery is but a hope of Toys
That thing once slave to me, who boasts his got
A Treatise on the Matrix piping hot,
375. Who can with Microscopic Glass descry
New hidden beauties in the nether Eye
What if that thing was suffer'd to escape
Because his Manhood could not reach a rape
Must ————— go dishonour to our Name
380. Free and ————— to his Act of shame
No let the Rascal pay a swinging Fine
And be the profit of the sentence mine.

- Here Self applauded mighty T————
Roll'd his fierce Optics round and acted drunk
385. A Solemn Silence spread its Canvas wings
Not such as that of which the Poet sings
When dusky Melancholy sitting nigh
From sound and clatter guards the nether Sky
When Cruger in his drudgery of Bliss
390. Creeps idly on and scarcely moves to kiss
When ————— a pretty plaything for a child
And never but in conversation wild,
Steals from the condescending Ladies Bed,
And vows he hears her jealous husband tread.

Thomas Chatterton

- 74 395. The silence which presided o'er the throng
Has been but little notify'd in song
'Tis a mercantile talk which can convey
Various Ideas from the backward way
Whilst in each variety of sound
400. Each rising Zephyr has a Postern found
Long had this conversation held; when lo!
Great *Drummond* rose; distempers greatest foe.
Soft is his Physic, softer still his voice,
Soft as the heavenly harmony of Boyce
405. Not such as *Broderip* tortures into sound
Broderip for frippery of taste renown'd
Whose jarring humdrum Symphonies of flats
Rival the harmony of midnight cats
What charms have Music when great *Broderip*
sweats
410. To murder sound to what his brother sets;
With scraps of Ballad Tunes, and gude Scotch
Sangs
Which Godlike Ramsay to his Bagpipe twangs
With tatter'd Fragments of forgotten Plays
With playford's Melody to Sternholds Lays
415. This Pipe of Science might B—— comes
And a strange unconcerted jumble thrums
Rouz'd to Devotion, by a sprightly air
Danc'd into piety and jiggd to pray'r
A modern Hornpipes murder greets our Ears
420. The Heavenly Music of Domestic Spheres!
Sacred to sleep in his invented Key,
Dull doleful Diapasens die away
Lull'd by the doleful Vacancy of sound
The Vicar slumbers and the snoar goes round

The Marvelous Boy

Whilst B———— at his passive Organ groans, 75
Thro all his dumb variety of tones.

- How unlike Allen: Allen is divine
Has something sentimental, tender, fine
No superficial whimsies e'er disgrac'd
430. His more refin'd his sentimental taste
He keeps the passions with the sound in play
And the Soul trembles with the trembling Key
Great *Drummond* rose; Children of science
hear,
And hear me from all prejudices clear.
435. Great the Offender, greater the offence
Tis against reasons law and common sense
But if you credit Blackstone's first reports
You'll find it no offence in lower Courts
Since then deficiencies in Law are so
440. Self punish'd let the Beastly Culprit go
He ended murmurs haild the speech divine
The Sentence final and the accent fine
All the rough Gang to mercy were inclin'd
For now the Clock struck three and none had
din'd.

End of the 1st Book, May 3rd, 1770.

821

109391

C

E

DATE DUE			

Ellinger, Ester
Thomas Chatterton

Trinity College Library

Washington, D. C. 20017

Trinity College Library

821 C, E

TR trin

Thomas Chatterton,



3 7090 000 540 847

08-APQ-125